

Thank you for joining us in this Growth Intensive on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. To help you prepare for the seminar, here are some resources to help you get the most out of our time together. At a minimum, I would recommend watching the first documentary listed below. If you are an overachiever, reading one of the biographies and/or watching the other films would be excellent. If you have no time for any of these, I have written the world's shortest biography of Bonhoeffer and attached it after the list of resources.

Documentary Films

There is an excellent documentary produced in 2003 entitled Bonhoeffer, directed by Martin Doblmeier (himself a believer). It is currently available on Amazon Prime.

An older documentary produced for a Christian audience exists entitled Hanged on a Twisted Cross: The Life, Convictions and Martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, narrated by Ed Asner. It is also available on Amazon Prime.

Another documentary film available on Amazon Prime was made in 1982 which includes many interviews with Bonhoeffer's friends and family who had already died when the 2003 documentary was made. It is called Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Memories and Perspectives. It was filmed in black and white which makes it look older than it is.

Biographies

1. Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christiane Tietz, 2016. There are several short (<200 pages) biographies of Bonhoeffer, but this one is by far the best. Dr. Tietz is a professor at the University of Zurich and is generally considered to be the current authority on both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance, Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, 2010. Dr. Schlingensiepen is the son of a Confessing Church pastor so he grew up around people who had been close to Bonhoeffer and was a close friend of Eberhard Bethge. Therefore, this includes a few personal anecdotes not available in the other books.
3. Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy, Eric Metaxas, 2010. The best seller of Bonhoeffer biographies, it reads like a page-turner novel.
4. Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Charles Marsh, 2014. Highly acclaimed at its release by both The Wall Street Journal and Christianity Today, it is well written but more critical in tone than Metaxas.
5. The Faithful Spy: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Plot to Kill Hitler, John Hendrix, 2018. Done in art and text in the style of a graphic novel, this can be read in a lazy Sunday afternoon and is very accurate.
6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, Eberhard Bethge, revised ed. 2000. At 1048 pages, this is the big one! Everyone who has written about Bonhoeffer has used this book. A must for serious Bonhoeffer students and a great doorstop for all others.

The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Germany in 1906 as the 6th of 8 children into a happy, intellectual family who were part of Berlin's upper crust. His father was the leading neurologist of his day and head of that department at the medical school of Berlin University. His mother was a strong believer and home schooled the children through their elementary years. His father, however, was functionally an agnostic so the family rarely went to church. This made it quite surprising when, as a teenager, Dietrich announced his decision to become a theologian. He was a brilliant student at the university and graduated with his doctorate at age 21. After a year as assistant pastor of a German-speaking congregation in Barcelona, he came to New York City for a year's study at Union Seminary. While there, his best friends were a French pacifist and an African-American. He became involved with the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem where he taught Sunday School and fell in love with the music. It was here that he discovered the Sermon on the Mount and as a result, his view of Christ and the church was transformed (he would later say that this is where he became a Christian). He then returned to Berlin University as a professor of theology about the time the Nazis came to power.

The Nazi seizure of power was swift and complete with the state church (Lutheran) being forced to adopt Nazi ideology. Pastors and theology professors with Jewish ancestry were dismissed and all ministers "requested" to take an oath of personal loyalty to Adolf Hitler. A small group of church leaders rebelled and formed the "Confessing Church" in which Bonhoeffer was seen as a young radical for his absolute unwillingness to compromise with the Nazis at any point.

After failing to convince the Confessing Church to take a harder line against the Nazis in their treatment of the Jews, Bonhoeffer left for London where he led two German-speaking congregations. After two years he was called back to be the head of an illegal seminary in the tiny village of Finkenwalde, near the Polish border and (hopefully) far from the Gestapo's gaze.

At Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer experimented with a daily routine for himself and his students centered around worship, prayer, meditation on Scripture and service to others. The resulting community was transformative for all those involved. The Gestapo finally did catch up to them, however, and closed the seminary in 1937 after only two years of operation.

By 1939, war was imminent. Bonhoeffer could be drafted at any time and there was no such thing as conscientious objection in Hitler's Germany. He would be immediately shot when he refused to join. His friends gave him a way of escape and got him a teaching position at Union Seminary in New York. As soon as he arrived, however, he felt he had made a mistake. After less than a month Bonhoeffer concluded that he would have no part in the rebuilding of his country after Hitler if he did not suffer through the experience with his brothers and sisters who had no way of escape. He returned on the last ship before the outbreak of World War II.

His brother-in-law got him a job with military counterintelligence (Abwehr) which was actually a nest of conspirators plotting a coup against Hitler. This protected him from military service and allowed him to travel abroad. As far as the German government was concerned, he was using

his many foreign contacts to spread disinformation. In reality, he was letting the Allies know of the existence and intentions of the German resistance as well as smuggling Jews out of the country. All the while he continued to write and teach secretly as he was banned from doing so openly. During this time, he also became engaged to a 19 year old woman, Maria von Wedemeyer whose family was deeply involved in the multiple plots to kill Hitler.

The Gestapo finally caught up with the Abwehr conspirators and in April 1943 many including Dietrich, his sister and brother-in-law were arrested. He was able to write letters and receive visitors until the summer of 1944 when he disappeared into a series of Gestapo prisons and concentration camps. The change came when his involvement in the failed attempt on Hitler's life (chronicled in the movie Valkyrie) became known. He was hanged in Flossenburg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, only 2 weeks before it was liberated by Allied forces.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Growth Intensive Quotes & Notes

Bonhoeffer's Disciplines:

1. Engagement with Scripture: Reading it straight through - "Because the Scripture is a corpus, a living whole, the so-called lectio continua, or consecutive reading, will above all be worth considering for the Scripture reading... For those who want to hear, reading the biblical books in a sequential order forces them to go, and to allow themselves to be found, where God has acted once and for all for the salvation of human beings." – from Life Together
2. Engagement with Scripture: Formational as opposed to informational reading ("Silence before the Word") - "This encounter (with the Word), however, is given to them as a gift. Their silence will be richly rewarded if they do not set any conditions on how they expect this encounter to take place or what they hope to get from it, but simply accept it as it comes." – from Life Together
"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die" – from The Cost of Discipleship
3. Engagement with Scripture: Meditation on the Daily Texts - "So even today I will do no more than say a few words once again about the precious gift which is given us in meditation... Daily, quiet attention to the Word of God which is meant for me, even if it is only for a few minutes, will become for me the focal point of everything which brings inward and outward order into my life." – from Life Together
4. For those of you interested in using the Daily Texts – the app is called Moravian Daily Texts and costs \$1.99 per year.
5. Prayer: Meditation on Scripture leads into prayer - "There are three things for which the Christian needs a regular time alone during the day: meditation on the Scripture,

prayer and intercession.” “The consideration of Scripture leads into prayer. We have already said that the most promising way to pray is to allow oneself to be guided by the words of the Bible, to pray on the basis of the words of Scripture. In this way we will not fall prey to our own emptiness. Prayer means nothing else but the readiness to appropriate the Word, and what is more, to let it speak to me in my personal situation, in my particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations.” – from Life Together

6. Prayer: Intercession - “Offering intercessory prayer means nothing other than Christians bringing one another into the presence of God, seeing each other under the cross of Jesus as poor human beings and sinners in need of grace. Then, everything about other people that repels me falls away. Then I see them in all their need, hardship, and distress. Their need and their sin become so heavy and oppressive to me that I feel as if they were my own, and I can do nothing else but bid: Lord, you yourself, you alone, deal with them according to your firmness and your goodness. Offering intercessory prayer means granting other Christians the same right we have received, namely, the right to stand before Christ and to share in Christ’s mercy. Thus it is clear that intercessory prayer is also a daily service Christians owe to God and one another.” – from Life Together
7. Prayer: Fixed-hour prayer – see Appendix below
8. Compassion and Hospitality: Curiosity about other’s experiences (Listening) - “The first service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God’s Word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them... Many people seek a sympathetic ear and do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking even when they should be listening. But Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either; they will always be talking even in the presence of God...But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been entrusted to them by the one who is indeed the great listener and in whose work they are to participate. We should listen with the ears of God, so that we can speak the Word of God.” – from Life Together
9. Compassion and Hospitality: Empathy - “There are thus three possibilities for action that the church can take vis-à-vis the state: first (as we have said), questioning the state as to the legitimate state character of its actions, that is, making the state responsible for what it does. Second is service to the victims of the state’s actions. The church has an unconditional obligation toward the victims of any societal order, even if they do not belong to the Christian community... The third possibility is not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself.” – from the essay “The Church and the Jewish Question” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (English) vol. 12
“In Washington I lived completely among the African Americans and through the students was able to become acquainted with all the leading figures of the African American movement, was in their homes, and had extraordinarily interesting

discussions with them. The conditions are really rather unbelievable. Not just separate railway cars, tramways, and buses south of Washington, but also, for example, when I wanted to eat in a small restaurant with an African American, I was refused service.” – from Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (English) vol. 10

10. Compassion and Hospitality: Righteous Adventurousness - “During my overall stay in America, I spent a great deal of time getting to know the African American problem from every angle and also observing white America from this rather hidden perspective. Through my friendship with an African American student at the seminary, I was introduced not only to the leaders of the young African American movement at Howard College in Washington, but also in Harlem... For more than six months, I was in one of the large Baptist churches in Harlem every Sunday at 2:30 in the afternoon, and together with my friend, and often as his substitute, had a group of young African Americans in the Sunday school; I conducted Bible study for some African American women and once a week helped out in a weekday church school. Hence not only did I become well acquainted with several young African Americans; I also visited their homes several times. *This personal acquaintance with African Americans was one of the most important and gratifying events of my stay in America.*” – from Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (English) vol. 10 (italics mine)

“I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people... Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security....” – from Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (English) vol. 15

11. Worship: He structured the day at the Finkenwalde Seminary around twice daily worship and memorized the hymns of Paul Gerhardt in case he was arrested.
12. Solitude: “There are three things for which the Christian needs a regular time alone during the day: meditation on the Scripture, prayer and intercession.” – from Life Together
13. Silence: “As there are definite hours in the Christian’s day for the Word,...so the day also needs definite times of silence, silence under the Word and silence that comes out of the Word. These will be especially the times before and after hearing the Word.” – from Life Together
14. Community: “Let him who cannot be alone beware of community.” “Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.” – from Life Together

15. Simplicity: Revealed more in his life than in his writings. Remember the pictures of his spartan room.
16. Time in Nature: Bonhoeffer makes references to this in his letters throughout his life, especially in prison.
17. Music and Art: Frequent references in his letters

Books by Bonhoeffer

1. Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Investigation of the Sociology of the Church, 1930
2. Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology, 1931
3. Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1 – 3, 1937
4. (The Cost of) Discipleship, 1937
5. Life Together, 1939
6. Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible, 1940
7. Ethics, unfinished, 1949 (published posthumously)
8. Letters and Papers from Prison, 1951, expanded edition 1970 (published posthumously)
9. Love Letters from Cell 92, 1994. Contains letters to and from his fiancée which were not included in #8 above as they were not made available until 15 years after her death. Most of this material is by Maria with shorter responses from Dietrich.
10. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (English), 17 volumes, 2014

My recommendation for people who have never read any of Bonhoeffer's works but want to start doing so is to begin with Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible. It is only 86 pages long and can be read in an afternoon but can lead to a lifetime of transformative practice. Next try either Life Together or Letters and Papers from Prison. These both read easily but are packed full of ideas that will keep you pondering and praying. The Cost of Discipleship is more challenging and is best read after you have read one of the biographies as it is very rooted in the struggle of the Confessing Church against the German (Nazi) Christians.

For Further Study

For those who are interested in pursuing the spiritual disciplines mentioned in the growth intensive further, here are some additional resources:

1. Spiritual formation and the role of spiritual disciplines:
God in My Everything, Ken Shigamatsu – An overview of the role of spiritual disciplines in a life being transformed by the grace of God. Very easy to read and includes exercises you can experiment with on your own.
The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard – This gives the biblical basis for why the spiritual disciplines are important for our transformation into the image of Christ.
Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster – This gives practical advice about how to get started with incorporating the disciplines into your life.
2. Engagement with Scripture:
Eat this Book, Eugene Peterson
Shaped by the Word, M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.
3. Prayer:
The Praying Life, Paul Miller
4. Worship:
John Hewlett will be leading a future Growth Intensive on Worship as Formation
5. Solitude and Silence:
Invitation to Solitude and Silence, Ruth Haley Barton
6. Community:
Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
7. Simplicity:
Freedom of Simplicity, Richard Foster

APPENDIX ON FIXED HOUR PRAYER

The ancient practice of fixed hour prayer could take an entire Growth Intensive of its own and we did not have much time to introduce it here. Therefore, I have included as an appendix some material I prepared for a deacon retreat several years ago about that topic. That retreat was based on Bonhoeffer's Life Together. If your interest in this practice is stimulated, I would recommend reading Praying with the Church by Scot McKnight.

The basic idea is that early Christians stopped several times a day to pray and that the Psalms served as their prayer book. Bonhoeffer wrote that each of the Psalms could be related to one of the seven parts of the Lord's Prayer. Although he never explicitly wrote it down, we have reason to believe that he stopped several times a day to pray the Lord's Prayer and at least one of the Psalms. I think this habit was a key part of his walk with God. I have underlined a suggested Psalm in each group but if the Lord leads you to others, that is great.

Psalm 119:164 – Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.

Ancient Traditional Times of Prayer: daybreak, beginning of the workday, noon,

midafternoon, sundown, before bed, midnight

The Lord's Prayer

1. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name
2. Your Kingdom come
3. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
4. Give us today our daily bread
5. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors
6. And lead us not into temptation
7. But deliver us from the evil one

1. Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise: 9, 18, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 65, 66, 92, 95, 96, 98, 100, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 113, 115, 116, 117, 118, 134, 135, 136, 138, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150

2. Kingdom Psalms: 2, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16, 24, 45, 46, 47, 48, 53, 60, 68, 72, 74, 76, 79, 80, 83, 84, 85, 87, 89, 93, 97, 99, 110, 114, 122, 125, 126, 132, 133, 137

3. Psalms of Instruction and Faith: Instruction: 1, 19, 50, 67, 78, 81, 112, 119. Faith: 3, 4, 5, 11, 17, 26, 27, 31, 44, 61, 62, 63, 70, 71, 86, 91, 94, 123, 124, 131, 139

4. Psalms of Provision: 20, 21, 23, 41, 58, 75, 82, 101, 121, 127, 128

5. Psalms of Repentance and Suffering: Repentance: 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143. Suffering: 22, 40, 55, 69, 109, 141

6. Psalms of Temptation and Persecution: 7, 10, 13, 35, 42, 43, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 64, 73, 77, 88, 120, 129, 140, 142

7. Psalms of Death and Justice: 36, 37, 39, 49, 90